

## JAMIE JOHNSON: IRISH TRAVELLERS

By Aline Smithson | January 6, 2017



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For the past several years, **Jamie Johnson** has packed up her cameras and headed to Ireland to photograph the Irish Travellers, capturing the children whose growing up often appears to be very short. Jamie has had a lifelong interest in photographing children around the world (and in her own backyard), giving her a deep connection to and interest in her subjects. Jamie will be showing this work for the first time at **Photo LA** at **CollectorWorks** (booth 612) from January 12 -15th as part of this international photo expo.

Jamie Johnson is a Los Angeles photographer specializing in alternative processes. Her work has been published in many photography magazines and is exhibiting in galleries worldwide. She has received the Julia Margaret Cameron Portfolio Award and Spider Black and White Photography Award. Jamie's work is in the permanent collection of the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles and Archaeology Museum in Alabama and currently has a show at the Norton Museum of Fine Art.

As a mother, artist, and observer of familial connections around the globe, Jamie makes work that speaks to memory and time passing, but also leaves room for humor and irony. A number of years ago, while still shooting digital imagery for her client work, she returned to creating photographs with historical processes. With use an 8 x 10 camera and 4x5 cameras with lenses made during the Civil War era, then process the imagery as Wet Plate Collodion photography (also known as Tin Types). The process of working this way requires stillness on the part of the sitter, and tremendous focus on the part of the photographer as each image is a unique object, documenting a split second, never to be duplicated. Her series *Vices* took four years to complete and has been exhibited in silver gelatin prints and published around the globe.



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### **My Journey with the Irish Travellers**

*As a mother and fine art photographer whose bread and butter comes from family and child photography, my passion for faces of the next generation has been a lifelong focus. In my free time, I travel the world capturing images children and childhood around the globe. From Laos to Cuba, from the Amazon to India, I have found a universality in the world of children. I have always been particularly interested in observing how girls are raised, examining the morals, values, and education of the next generation of young women.*



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*Three years ago, I was invited by a photographer friend to document a community of Irish Travellers during the Ballinasloe Horse Fair and Festival, an event when travelers come from all over the Ireland and Europe to connect, sell puppies and ponies, and marry off their children. The fair takes place in October and is held annually in Ballinasloe, the second largest town in County Galway, in the western part of Ireland. The Travelers set up camp at the festival, where family and friends can reunite and share stories. It is not an easy community to penetrate, but after a few introductions and lots of smiling, I was given access into their lives. It was an amazing journey, and I made connections with so many kind and generous families. They allowed me to photograph their lives and cultures. The children followed me around and took turning using my cameras. I learned their traditions of being sharply dressed young boys and overly provocatively dressed young girls yet still very Catholic, their goals of falling in love, getting married young and producing many children. And a strong sense of taking care of each other and family values and always respecting God.*



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*Travellers are an indigenous minority who, have been part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers long shared history, cultural values, language, customs and traditions make them a self-defined group, and one which is recognizable and distinct. Their culture and way of life, of which nomadism is an important factor, distinguishes them from the sedentary (settled) population. The Irish Travellers are a nomadic population, living on the fringes of society. Often uneducated, this Catholic community is required to marry within their clan. There are an estimated 25,000 Travellers in Ireland, making up more than 4,485 Traveller families. This constitutes approximately 0.5% of the total national population. It is estimated that an additional 15,000 Irish Travellers live in Britain, with a further 10,000 Travellers of Irish descent living in the United States of America. Travellers, as individuals and as a group, experience a high level of prejudice and exclusion in Irish society.*





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*I returned to Ballinasloe last year and I felt a deeper connection with the wonderful people I met. They brought me up to date with family gossip and life events and welcomed me into their extended families where I spent time with Travellers of all ages. A group of family matriarchs invited me in each day, gave me a beer and told me all the stories since I had last visited. Who got engaged, married, who got arrested, who lost their caravan, who got a bigger caravan, a really genuine group of women happy to have a new American friend. They told me how sorry they felt for me that I only had two children, and my goals should be to have as many as possible. They were as interested in my strange Los Angeles life as I was of theirs. I was struck by the timeless quality of their faces and the deep connection to family. As when I photograph anywhere, it is always the children who draw me in. I love listening to their stories and thoughts on life. Growing up in this nomadic lifestyle is all they know and they are quite proud people. The prejudice is hard to believe until you see it with your own eyes. 11 year old Annmarie wanted to look at new clothes and asked me to come with her to the shop on the high street as they most likely would not let her in. We went in together and looked at cute trendy clothes and the lady followed us around the store so closely I could feel her breath on my neck. I watch the police harass many of my young friends for just walking around. I heard well dress Irish women call them "trash" loudly as they walk by. These kids are sweet but tough as this is the only lifestyle they know. I look forward to going back in 2017.*



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